



Staff Sgt. Gregory Jacob and Airman Cora

New rules may let more Airmen live off base

BY JENNIFER E. WEST
Nucleus staff writer

The Air Force adopted a new policy on Jan. 1 that requires bases to provide dormitory housing to unaccompanied Airmen below the rank of senior airman with less than three years of service.

Past policy required providing the housing to all unaccompanied Airmen below staff sergeant.

Chief Master Sgt. Gerald Murray, chief master sergeant of the Air Force, said in an Air Force Print News story that the policy change is designed to make the number of dormitory rooms required to be provided by the Air Force more predictable.

Chief Murray stated that basing construction policy on years in service rather than on rank was more manageable and accurate for predicting needs.

Pinning on staff sergeant rank now can be achieved in as little as 4.6 years where as the promotion once took seven or eight years, Chief Murray added.

Chief Master Sgt. Jim Camp, 58th Special Operations Wing command chief master sergeant, views the policy change as a positive for the Airmen at Kirtland AFB.

Chief Master Sgt. Pam Derrow, 377th Air Base Wing command chief master sergeant, views the policy change as a “great opportunity for our young troops to be able to get out on their own. I think it will be a great morale booster.

“This new Air Force dorm policy to allow Airmen to move out of the dorms at three years time in service is a winning situation for our Kirtland AFB Airmen,” Chief Derrow said.

“With the excess of family housing at Kirtland AFB and the recent change to allow unaccompanied military members to occupy that housing, senior airmen can have their own houses at an extremely affordable rate.

“If two unaccompanied Airmen go in together,” she continued, “to split the rent for one of the Kirtland family houses, they can probably pocket a little money.”

Chief Camp encourages Airmen to visit the housing office to apply to get their own houses.

Basic Allowance for Housing rates make quality, off-base housing affordable for most senior airmen.

In 2005, that housing allowance is projected to pay for 100 percent of off-base housing costs.

K-9 Airman Cora career ends

Members of the Kirtland AFB Military Working Dog unit said goodbye to one of their canine comrades in late December when Airman Cora/X046 died.

Airman Cora required euthanasia for medical reasons.

The German Shepherd born in 1983 was certified as a patrol and narcotic dog March 17, 1995 at the DOD Dog Center at Lackland AFB, Texas, when she was assigned to Kirtland AFB.

Airman Cora was trained to detect odors of marijuana, hashish, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine and ecstasy. She worked last with Staff Sgt. Gregory Jacob, assigned as a team last January.

During their brief time as a team, Sergeant Jacob and Airman Cora were directly responsible for four narcotic finds of illegal drugs and paraphernalia on the installation.

Thunderbirds release schedule

NELLIS AFB, Nev. (AFPN)—The U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron, known as the Thunderbirds, announced its 2004 air show schedule.

The team is scheduled to perform more than 65 shows in 22 states, Canada and Asia.

The 2004 schedule is:

- March**
- ★ 27, 28—Punta Gorda, Fla.
- April**
- ★ 3, 4—Eglin AFB, Fla.;
 - ★ 17, 18—San Diego;
 - ★ 24, 25—March Air Reserve Base, Calif.

- May**
- ★ 1, 2—Millville, N.J.;
 - ★ 8, 9—Lake City, Fla.;
 - ★ 15, 16—Dover AFB, Del.;
 - ★ 22—Charleston AFB, S.C.;
 - ★ 23—Langley AFB, Va.
 - ★ 29, 30—Moffett Field, Calif.

- June**
- ★ 5, 6—Maxwell AFB, Ala.;
 - ★ 12—Hill AFB, Utah;
 - ★ 13—Naval Air Station Fallon, Nev.;
 - ★ 19, 20—North Kingston Air National Guard Base, R.I.;
 - ★ 26, 27—Janesville, Wisc.

- July**
- ★ 3, 4—Kansas City, Mo.;
 - ★ 10, 11—Binghampton, N.Y.;
 - ★ 17, 18—Cold Lake, Alberta;
 - ★ 21—Cheyenne, Wyo.;
 - ★ 24, 25—Fairchild AFB, Wash.;
 - ★ 31—Greenfield, Ind.

- August**
- ★ 1—Greenfield, Ind.;
 - ★ 14, 15—Westover ARB, Mass.;
 - ★ 21, 22—Offutt AFB, Neb.;
 - ★ 28, 29—Toledo, Ohio.

- September**
- ★ 4—Ellsworth AFB, S.D.;
 - ★ 11—Andersen Air Base, Guam;
 - ★ 14—Kadena AB, Japan;
 - ★ 16—Kunsan AB, South Korea;
 - ★ 19—Osan AB, South Korea;
 - ★ 25, 26—Hyakuri AB, Japan;
 - ★ 30—Misawa AB, Japan.
- October**
- ★ 3—Hamamatsu AB, Japan;
 - ★ 9, 10—Redding, Calif.;
 - ★ 16, 17—Houston;
 - ★ 23, 24—El Paso, Texas;
 - ★ 30, 31—Lafayette, La.
- November**
- ★ 6—Camden, S.C.;
 - ★ 7—Seymour Johnson AFB, N.C.;
 - ★ 13, 14—Nellis AFB, Nev.

The U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron is an Air Combat Command unit composed of eight pilots (including six demonstration pilots), four support officers, four civilians and about 120 enlisted people performing in more than 25 Air Force specialties.

A Thunderbirds aerial demonstration is a mix of formation flying and solo routines.

The pilots perform about 30 maneuvers during a demonstration. The entire show, including ground and air, runs about one hour and 15 minutes.

Since show schedules are subject to change, members of the community should confirm a performance before traveling a long distance.

Call the public affairs office on the military installation where the event is planned or the local chamber of commerce at civilian locations.

VITA Tax Center opens

BY JOHN FORD
VITA Tax Center

The Kirtland AFB VITA Tax Center opens for business Jan. 26. All active duty and retired military personnel and their dependents are eligible to have their tax returns prepared and electronically filed at no charge.

The Tax Center is in 377th Air Base Wing Headquarters, Building 20604, near the Staff Judge Advocate Office.

The U.S. Air Force and the Internal Revenue Service jointly sponsor the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program on base.

It is run almost entirely by active duty and retired military volunteers. Kirtland AFB is just one of hundreds of sites worldwide that provide free tax services to the military.

Hours of operation throughout the tax season are 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday, Wednesday and Thursday; 1-8 p.m., Tuesday; and 9 a.m.-noon, Friday.

Tax return preparation will be by appointment only.

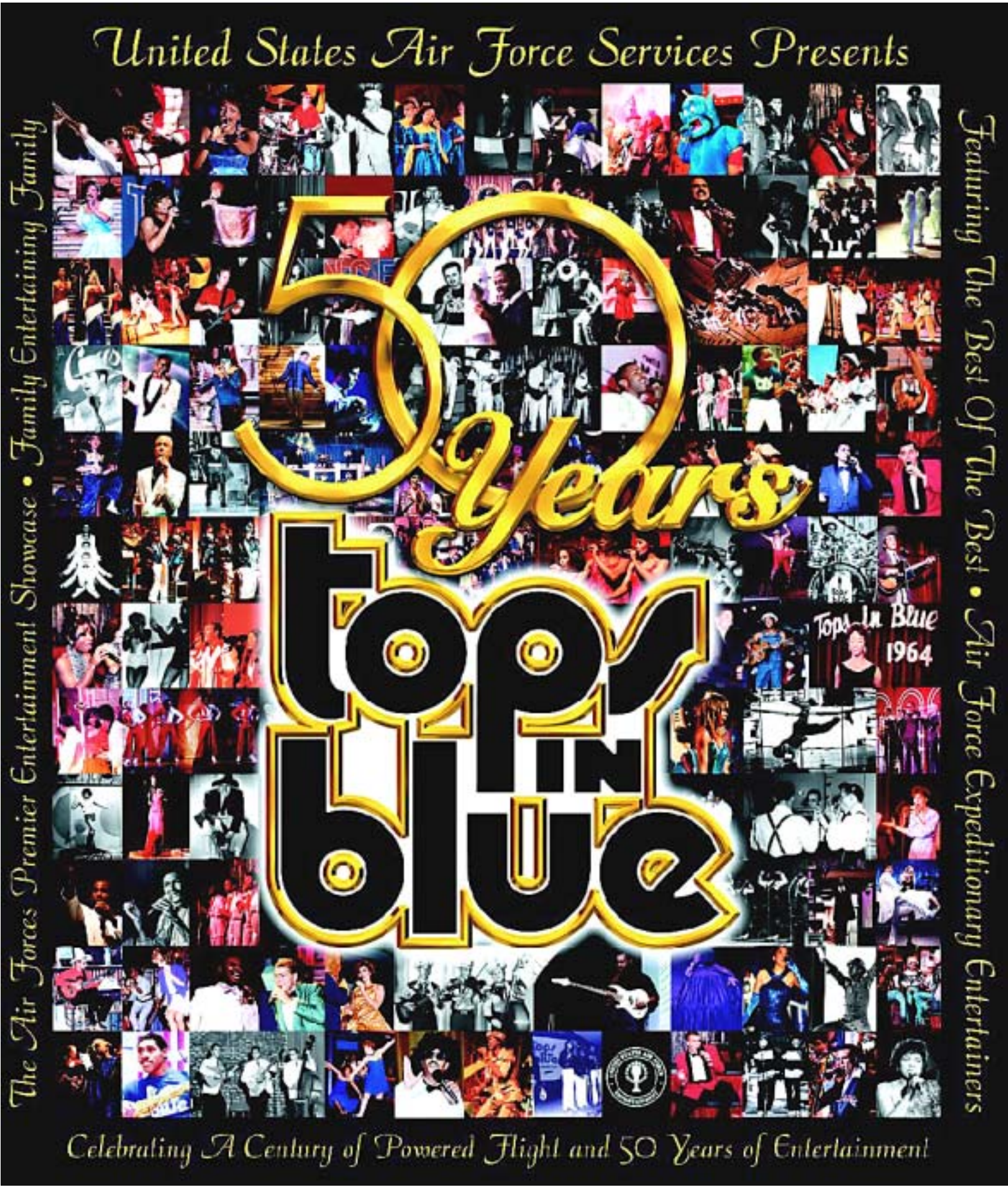
Call 853-1700 starting Jan. 22 to schedule an appointment.

Customers will be expected to complete the Tax Center’s Client Intake Questionnaire prior to having their tax return done. The questionnaire may be downloaded from the Tax Center’s Web site, www.kirtland.af.mil/Organizations/StaffJudge/taxcenter/TChome.htm.

Directions, information on state returns, and tax tips may also be found at the site. For those without a computer, the forms will be available starting Jan. 22 on racks outside the Tax Center.

In addition to the information about income and deductions, tax customers are requested to bring a copy of their tax return from last year to their appointment—as well as the Social Security cards for all members of the family.

Also, all those receiving an advance child tax credit this past summer should bring the IRS notice sent to them at that time.



Air Force Tops in Blue rolls into N.M.

The premier entertainment showcase of the Air Force, *Tops in Blue*, brings its “Soaring with Eagles” to Albuquerque’s Kiva Auditorium, Feb. 3, 7 p.m.

The evening of free musical entertainment and visual delight is performed by Air Force members who travel worldwide, entertaining America’s warfighters. But the show in Albuquerque is presented for everyone to enjoy.

Musical selections range from Tina Turner’s “Proud Mary” and the Supremes to MC Hammer, BOYZ II MEN and Ricky Martin in the medley performance.

Transportation for active duty military and their families is provided from Kirtland AFB. The shuttle bus collection point is the parking lot to the east of the Thunderbird Dining Facility Building 20350.

There are Shuttles every 30 minutes between 4:30-6 p.m. The shuttles leave the Kiva after the show at 9:15 p.m.

If you wish to drive, parking fees in the area range from \$5-\$8, so the shuttle is a cost-effective alternative for military families.

Seating for active duty military members is 5-6 p.m. and seating for the general public begins at 6 p.m.

The Kiva Auditorium is in Albuquerque Convention Center, downtown at Second and Tijeras streets.

VA gives medical priority to disabled vets

BY ARMY SGT. 1ST CLASS DOUG SAMPLE
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON (AFP)—Veterans Affairs officials want to send veterans with service-connected medical problems to the front of the line when it comes to receiving medical treatment at VA facilities.

Anthony J. Principi, VA secretary, issued a new directive to all VA medical facilities requiring that “priority access” be given to qualifying veterans seeking appointments for treatment.

The directive covers hospitalization and outpatient care, and does not apply to veterans seeking care for medical problems not related to a service-connected disability.

Priority access means that when qualifying veterans come to a VA treatment facility for inpatient or outpatient care, they will receive an appointment within 30 days, Mr. Principi said.

“It’s really as simple as that,” he said. Veterans seeking treatment need only let the administrative clerk or nurse know of their service-connected

disability status, Mr. Principi said.

If a VA facility is unable to schedule an appointment within the 30-day time limit, an appointment must be arranged for care at another VA facility or at a facility under contract in the private sector.

“I’ve always felt that it is important to give veterans with service-connected disabilities a priority for care,” Mr. Principi said.

“I want to make sure that those who have disability related to military service have a high priority for health care, whether it is inpatient or outpatient, and this new priority scheme is to ensure that those who are disabled go to the ‘front of the line.’”

The new policy will not be without its challenges. More than 25 million veterans are in the VA’s health-care system, and the department reports the number of veterans seeking medical care has risen significantly, from 2.9 million in 1995 to nearly 5 million in 2003.

The VA operates more than 1,300 medical facilities, including 162 hospitals and 800 outpatient clinics, but officials report the increase in veterans

seeking care “outstrips VA’s capacity to treat them.”

Mr. Principi acknowledged that veterans have suffered long waits for appointments at medical facilities in some parts of the country. He said the goal for his department will be to reduce those lines and to ensure that veterans are cared for in a timely manner.

In the past, priority access to health care went only to veterans with disabilities rated at 50 percent or more; for severely disabled veterans, priority is extended for nonservice-connected medical problems, according to VA guidelines.

However, the new directive now makes priority access available to all veterans injured in service to the country, Mr. Principi said.

The VA was established to care for the men and women who served in the armed forces, and that “we should never lose sight of that,” he said. His department’s priority must “always be



the men and women disabled in service to their country,” Mr. Principi said.

In addition, Mr. Principi said his department will work harder to reduce the backlog of disability claims for veterans, and VA is making “tremendous progress” in that effort.

“They’ve shown renewed commitment ensuring that if a veteran files a claim for disability compensation, he or she doesn’t have to wait six months to a year,” Mr. Principi said. “We are going to get that claim decided in 100 days or less.”